

THIRD GLOBAL FORUM OF THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS
in Rio de Janeiro
BRIDGING CULTURES, BUILDING PEACE
'Empowering Women through Education'
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*Delivered by Deputy Counselor for ECOSOC issues at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in New York,
Ms. Laurie Phipps*

- I want to thank you for the invitation to participate in this panel on Empowering Women Through Education. I want to thank Mona El Tahawy for her warm introduction as well as to my distinguished fellow panelists.
- I also want to highlight the important work being done by the organizing partners of this event, the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, and MenEngage. Your leadership and efforts are critical to empowering women and girls worldwide.
- As you know, empowerment of women globally is a top priority for the United States. In March at the UN Commission on the Status of Woman Secretary Clinton said, "The status of the world's women is not only a matter of morality and justice. It is also a political, economic, and social imperative. Put simply, the world cannot make lasting progress if women and girls in the 21st century are denied their rights and left behind."
- The Obama Administration truly believes that an investment in women and girls is an investment in our own security, prosperity and future of the planet.
- We know that when women and girls receive more education, they are able to contribute greatly to their families, villages and nations as successful workers, healthy mothers, and full participants in the political life of their countries.
- From breaking the cycle of poverty to enhanced employment opportunities and better health, the benefits of educating girls and women are well-documented.
 - For example, according to a report recently released by United Nations Development Programme, the GDP of countries such as India, Indonesia and Malaysia could be raised significantly if women in those countries were employed at the level of many developed countries
- As we invest in empowering women and girls globally, it is imperative that the international community focus on education and closing the education gender gap.
- Although the number of girls and women enrolled in schools around the world has gone up – we also know that women are still the majority of the world's poor and unschooled. For example, it is estimated that 759 million young people and adults lack basic literacy skills, and nearly two-thirds of them are women.

Effective Strategies for Educating Girls

- The Obama Administration has an effective strategy working with agencies and departments across the U.S. government to support a comprehensive effort to educate women and girls internationally.

- With regard to our development strategy, the United States works through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to close the global gender gap that inhibits tens of millions of girls from going to school.
- We have three pronged strategy that removes obstacles to educating girls by assessing the degree of education disadvantage, identifying gender-related obstacles, and implementing remedies to remove and overcome barriers.
- Our strategy for educating girls also requires a focus on basic education in developing countries, including post-conflict settings such as Iraq and Afghanistan. We place a special emphasis on improving opportunities for girls, women as well as other underserved and disadvantaged populations.
- In 2008, 68% of USAID's basic education programs in 70 countries explicitly addressed girls' education and gender equality in education.
- We are also working through public-private partnership to address the gender gap. For example through Power to Lead Alliance, a new public-private partnership between USAID and CARE USA, we are promoting leadership in girls aged 10-14 in vulnerable communities in Egypt, Honduras, India, Malawi, Tanzania and Yemen.
- To address the issue of equality of access, the United States supports the Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program which will provide 550,000 scholarships by 2010 to girls in African Countries at the primary and secondary levels.
- The United States is also working closely with community and religious leaders, government officials, educators and parents in Asia and Africa to:
 - Change attitudes and perceptions towards girls' education and development, and establish local monitoring committees to help increase the enrollment and educational performance of school-age girls;
 - Prevent early marriage which can lead to curtailed educational and employment opportunities for girls and serious health consequences including maternal and child mortality and obstetric fistula.
 - Increase access to reproductive health information and services needed to delay and space pregnancies to reduce the likelihood of medical conditions from early pregnancy.
 - Finally we are committed to engaging boys and men in confronting attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality by analyzing and identifying the root causes of the inequality, and suggesting steps to transform these education systems.

International Effort

- The United States is working with key international partners, including the United Nations, and across the UN system to advance girls' and women's access to education in all its forms.
- Around the world, we are supporting partnerships with other governments and local institutions to support literacy, primary education, higher education exchanges, and the professional development of teachers.
- For example, working with UNESCO, one of our top priorities has been promoting literacy, with a particular focus on tens of millions young people and adults, that lack basic literacy skills.
- To that end, informal/non-formal education has played and will continue to play a key role in decreasing the global rate of illiterate adults. We know that informal education can be more flexible and help reach adults who have long ago dropped out of the formal schools system or who were systematically denied access to school.

- As the largest Government donor to UNICEF, the United States is supporting efforts to secure safe, rights-based, quality education for each and every girl and boy. For example, UNICEF's Child-Friendly Schools model which has been implemented in more than 50 countries, utilizes curricula that are specifically inclusive and gender-sensitive.
- Where barriers to gender equity exist, UNICEF works with governments to develop alternative education methods that promote gender inclusiveness in education. In Afghanistan, UNICEF has helped establish community-based schools in rural areas that allow for the participation of girls. In 2008, the Government of Afghanistan ran 815 of these community-based schools, with an enrollment of nearly 30,000 students.
- We are also examining ways to promote access to education for girls as a human rights issue at the UN Human Rights Council and addressing the rights of girls and children at the UN General Assembly.
- The efforts of the United States and the international community to write a new chapter on empowering women, will be the tell-tale measure of whether the 21st century is truly one of human and global progress or whether millions of women and girls, representing half of the world's population, will continue to be left behind, undereducated, unprotected, economic possibilities restricted, and without a voice to advocate for their families, communities and nation.
- The United States believes that investing in the education of women and girls is not only the "right thing to do; but it is the smart thing to do." That is why we are committed to working with all of you in the lead up to 2015 to promote gender equality and the global empowerment of women.